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Allies or opponents?: power-sharing, civil society and gender

Abstract:

A developing body of literature is emerging to consider the gendered implications of power-sharing (consociational) governance. This literature argues that the structures inherent within power-sharing governance privilege ethnic/ethno-national identity, and thus impede the argument for greater women's descriptive and substantive political representation. This paper extends these arguments to consider how consociational theory addresses (or does not address) the role of civil society in post-conflict environments, and the gendered effects that this has on women's political voice in post-conflict society. Drawing on the conceptual literature on both consociational theory and women's political activism in conflict and post-conflict societies, it argues that power-sharing is overly concerned with formal representation to the detriment of an understanding of the role that civil society can play in peacebuilding. Whilst we acknowledge the importance of civil society retaining a critical distance from political institutions, we suggest several mechanisms for incorporating civil society into power-sharing arrangements. We argue throughout that a consideration of power-sharing and civil society helps to highlight the gendered issues that remain relatively ignored in post-conflict settings, and conclude that a broader understanding of both 'politics' and 'conflict' is required for power-sharing to be more equitable to women's descriptive and substantive representation.

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Introduction

Consociational power-sharing is an increasingly accepted method of promoting equality of representation in post-conflict governance following ethnically/ethno-nationally divided conflict. It is employed variously in Northern Ireland, Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Burundi, amongst others. However, it has now been argued extensively¹ that by focusing overtly on ethnic/ethno-national identities, consociationalism does little to promote women's rights or representation in post-conflict structures – and that, indeed, it may impede attempts to do so. This literature reasons that consociationalism creates an exclusionary form of citizenship based solely on ethnicity to the detriment of alternative identity markers,² such as gender or sexuality.

Whilst women also identify with ethnic and national identity markers, there are experiences and rights which are explicitly gendered and cross ethno-national divides. Gender analyses have become increasingly prominent in literature scrutinizing both the causes and outcomes of conflict.³ Yet this developing awareness of women's differential experiences of conflict rarely plays out in formal peace negotiations which continue to be male dominated spaces.⁴

The UN Security Council's suite of resolutions on 'Women, Peace and Security', developed since the initial resolution 1325 in 2000 have consistently emphasised the participation of women in post-conflict institutions as integral to peace-building. Despite growing international awareness and implementation plans for the resolutions, women remain largely excluded from the elite political arena, both in descriptive and substantive representation, with women's movements almost solely located in grassroots and civil society. We argue here, as others have done⁵ that consociationalism's focus on elite structural design would benefit from greater emphasis on the role that civil society can play in post-conflict settings – and that, as the majority of women's activism and political movement tends to occur in grassroots organisations, NGOs and civil society bodies, such a focus would also have an additional gendered benefit.

The purpose of this article is not to intervene in the broader debate on the merits of consociationalism as a tool for post-conflict politics per se.⁶ Rather, we are interested to consider one particular feature of the post-conflict context, civil society, and how its relative absence from discussion in consociational post-conflict frameworks affects women's political space. We illustrate how, across disparate contexts, women have organised on gendered concerns in civil society spaces both during and after conflict. Consequently, we investigate whether the theoretical framework of consociationalism can be extended to include civil society (and thus amplify women's voices) and suggest some potential mechanisms for such incorporation. We conclude by arguing that a consideration of civil society and power-sharing illustrates the conservative understandings of 'conflict' and 'politics' that consociationalism works from. Firstly however, we begin with an overview of the key features of consociational theory, its development and its role in post-conflict structures.

Consociational power-sharing and post-conflict governance

Consociational theory is largely accredited in its original form to the work of political scientist Arend Lijphart. Lijphart wrote originally in consideration of his native Netherlands,⁷ looking at the ways in which cleavages such as religious and linguistic difference could be accommodated

within one nation.⁸ According to his original definition, consociationalist democracies vary, but follow four basic principles:

1. *Executive power-sharing (EPS)*. Each of the main communities share power, in an executive chosen in accordance with the principles of representative government.
2. *Autonomy or Self-government*. Each enjoys some distinct measure of autonomy, particularly self-government in matters of cultural concern.
3. *Proportionality*. Each is represented proportionately in key public institutions and is a proportional beneficiary of public resources and expenditures.
4. *Veto-rights*. Each is able to prevent changes that adversely affect their vital interests.⁹

Following this prescription, consociational democracies reify ethno-national identity as the defining feature of representation, with little consideration for the roles that other forms of political identity might take. In this way, consociationalism understands ethno-national identity as fixed, permanent and the primary prism through which politics must be undertaken.

Lijphart's work has been extensively built upon by scholars of post-conflict societies, especially John McGarry and Brendan O'Leary. They argue that the long-established consociational basis of Western democracies such as Belgium could be extended to ethno-nationally divided post-conflict polities. This argument fundamentally shifted consociational thinking from a means of understanding established, long-existent Western societies, to a tool which could be used in post-conflict peacebuilding practice to build new structures. Their key contribution to consociational theory remains a distinction between liberal and corporate consociational systems. Liberal consociation argues that the key groups to be involved in power-sharing can emerge through a process of self-identification, rather than being prescribed from the centre (corporate consociation). In this way, liberal consociation attempts to avoid the trap of pre-prescribed identity, and to allow for other political identities to emerge within power-sharing governments. Yet it is telling that in liberal consociational set-ups, such optimism regarding the potential fluidity of identity within the political structures has failed to emerge, with ethno-national identity still entrenched and dominant.¹⁰

Further to this, feminist analysis of conflict and post-conflict peacebuilding illustrates how the roots of conflict are tied up in conservative notions of gender identity and militarized masculinities, and the justification of violence for the supposed protection of women and children.¹¹ Ignoring alternative identity explanations for conflict and reifying ethno-national identity in peace-building is problematic as it leaves fundamental aspects of conflict unresolved. Accordingly, a feminist understanding of peace-building sees the inclusion of women not just as a tool to encourage gender equality but one fundamental to achieve peace. From a feminist perspective, women's absence in consociational peace deals is thus concerning.

Examples of consociation in practice abound. The 1998 Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland remains one of the most well-known and celebrated examples of a peace agreement constituted around consociational power-sharing. Bosnia-Herzegovina adopted a particularly complex consociational set-up following the Balkan wars of the 1990s.¹² The Ohrid Framework Agreement signed in 2001 ended the brief conflict in Macedonia which displaced over 100,000 people. In a similar manner to Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia has a complex consociational set-up based around devolving power to regions where minority groups are a majority, and

consolidating power-sharing between various ethno-national identities.¹³ The Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement, of 2000, which slowly began to bring an end to Burundi's 12 year Civil War, is firmly consociational in nature, requiring a Hutu and a Tutsi Vice-President, and outlines key ethnic quotas for national and local government and security forces.¹⁴ Post-war Iraq also saw several elements of consociational democracy in the transitional period from 2003-2010.¹⁵ More recently, power sharing has been suggested as a means to cement peace in Sudan.¹⁶ Consociationalism has thus seen wide-spread deployment in the last twenty years as a key mechanism in building post-conflict institutions and government. In the adoption of power-sharing agreements, ethno-nationalism has thus been cemented as the primary political identity in all of these post-conflict contexts.

In spite of this proliferation of consociationalism as a part of post-conflict political arrangements, it is not without its critics. For those who argue against it, consociationalism provides an essentialist understanding of human identity, in that it creates institutions where people are defined by their ethnic identity alone (Oberschall and Palmer, 2005). Critiques of consociationalism argue that it solidifies identity around ethnic categories: reducing "cultural practices and political attitudes to taken-for-granted ethno-national 'communities'"¹⁷. In doing so, it thus fails to allow for real conflict transformation. Because identities have been fixed within the political system, a form of "mental partition"¹⁸ occurs in which there is no way for them to be transcended and for common ground to be established. As such, it merely provides a temporary halt to violence rather than permanently overcoming the identity issues at the root of conflict.

Furthermore, the anti-consociationalists' lasting critique is that consociational political settlements do not have a strong track record of successfully bringing about a lasting, stable peace. In Northern Ireland, the Agreement has acted more as a tool of conflict management than of conflict transformation. As Taylor describes, whilst it has signalled a period of much reduced paramilitary violence and political accommodation, "the Agreement has not marked the birth of a 'post-conflict', non-sectarian era"¹⁹. Whilst paramilitary violence has decreased, paramilitarism endures and has in some spheres morphed into organized crime. In addition, paramilitary intimidation continues, in particular towards young people.²⁰ In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the convoluted system of government brought about by the consociational design has led to legislative grid lock, with the 2014 protest movement hinged around citizens' perceived problems of government failure: "widespread poverty, unemployment ... political corruption and unaccountability"²¹. In Macedonia, local-level political bodies remain open to "hijacking" and "the rules of participation remain controlled by local political elites", with smaller ethnic groupings struggling to be heard,²² which was witnessed dramatically in the violent events in the Macedonian Parliament in April 2017. Burundi's post-conflict state structures have all but fallen apart. In 2015, President Pierre Nkurunziza's declaration that he would seek a third term in office was met with violence, hundreds dead and state repression of media and human rights activists.²³ It is on these facts, anti-consociationalists argue, that consociational power-sharing should be judged.

More recently, in addition to the above arguments against power-sharing, there has been a developing feminist and gendered critique of consociational theory. This critique acknowledges that women retain ethnic/ethno-national identifiers, but that they also have a political identity *as women*, and require acknowledged rights *as women*. Byrne and McCulloch argue that power-sharing

pacts award ethno-national elites, the bulk of which tend to be overwhelmingly male. In doing so, “such pacts miss opportunities to build a more inclusive model of post-conflict governance”.²⁴ Furthermore, when women try to organize as a political grouping to counteract this, their mobilization is often viewed as dangerous to both the resulting institutions and ethno-national identities.²⁵ Indeed, Korac²⁶ and Deiana²⁷ highlight the ways in which women’s organizing in Bosnia-Herzegovina has been presented by political elites as treacherous. Elsewhere Kennedy et al illustrate the “conceptual misalignment”²⁸ between long held feminist and gendered understandings of conflict and consociational ones. Whilst consociationalism views ethnic/ethno-national difference as the fundamental problem in divided societies, feminist and gendered work places greater emphasis on the role that gender plays in all conflict (including ethno-national conflict) and the disproportionate effect that conflicts can have on women and gender roles. Such feminist work emphasizes the difficulties that consociational democracies face in attempting to accommodate ‘other’ forms of difference out with the ethno-national paradigm – most especially minority communities (the non-white community in Northern Ireland or Vlachs in Macedonia²⁹) or communities which cut across the ethno-national divide, including women and the LGBTQ communities. Indeed, across a variety of contexts, the level of women’s representation in consociational democracies is much less than that of men.³⁰ As Christine Bell illustrates, in peace settlements where there are no specific calls to include women in power-sharing institutions (normally via use of legislative quotas) women’s elected representation is “unusually low”³¹.

There is therefore a developing appreciation within the literature on power-sharing that consociational democracies struggles to include women and gender-balanced representation. How then, might these systems be made more inclusive and more attentive to gendered difference? How might they address the issue of women’s descriptive and substantive representation? As is illustrated in greater detail below, across continents, civil society has seen a flourishing of women’s groups and activism in pre- and post-conflict situations, where women organize politically as women. Encouraging civil society’s participation in consociational democracies might then provide a means to counteract male-dominance of post-conflict institutions and the hegemony of ethnicity as the defining political identity.

Gender and civil society

Civil society has been an important site for women’s activism and rights across many conflict and post-conflict contexts. Women are often pushed out of formal politics in conflict/post-conflict settings, so their work tends to be within civil society instead in largely grassroots organisations.³² Despite the obvious losses, and the consequences of violence experienced during conflict, feminist academic thought has detailed the ways in which space may be opened up for women’s empowerment, and their participation in post-conflict social transformation:

Sharoni details the literacy programmes and skill-training courses led by Palestinian women during the intifada and the mobilisation against British Army curfews by Catholic/Nationalist women in Belfast during The Troubles as examples of women’s legitimate movement into political activism, in part facilitated through men’s involvement in conflict.³³ Women’s civil society peace activism has been a visible component of multiple conflict contexts, and has often consciously reached across societal divisions.³⁴ An example of this is the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, an association of Argentine mothers whose children were ‘disappeared’ by the government between 1976 and

1983. These women, strategically utilising conservative and traditional discourses and the exaltation of motherhood, were able to highlight human rights violations and the need for an end to conflict in a non-threatening way.³⁵ Anderson³⁶ also notes women's strategic use of maternal identity in Burundi as a means of being heard and included in peace negotiations and the final peace agreement.

Indeed, women have often united *as women* in ethnic or ethno-nationally divided societies. Such organising has been presented as crossing divides and employing methods of strategic essentialism to aid agreement or reconciliation. Cynthia Cockburn's examination of transversal dialogue amongst women in Northern Ireland, Israel/Palestine and Bosnia-Herzegovina illustrates how such dialogue is viewed as a feature of how women's groups communicate in a divided society.³⁷ She describes how women's groups in Northern Ireland and Bosnia-Herzegovina not only acknowledged ethnic difference but also placed a "positive value"³⁸ on its place in their organisations.

Furthermore, women's civic activism in divided societies has also helped to ensure a greater role for women and the consideration of gendered issues in formal politics. The work of women in civil society ensured that UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on 'Women, Peace and Security' was considered by the Security Council and marked a landmark achievement on the first debate considering women, peace and conflict in the Security Council³⁹. Although women's participation in peace agreements is low,⁴⁰ civil society organising has enabled women to have their voices and perspectives included in formal decision making. In Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC) emerged from strategic cross-community organisation. It was able to send a delegation to the peace talks and influence the peace agreement through the inclusion of a statement on women's political participation, and the development of a Civic Forum, intended to ensure civil society voices were heard in formal political decision making. Members of the NIWC went on to form an organisation 'Women Into Politics', to train women in skills of political engagement. In the early 1990s in what would later become Bosnia-Herzegovina, a Women's Lobby was formed to encourage political parties to address women's needs in areas such as employment and healthcare.⁴¹ Anderson explains how in Burundi women's consistent efforts (despite great resistance) ensured an all-women's negotiation session, which was able to 'engender' the peace agreement.⁴² Civil society women's movements can clearly influence the formal outcomes of peace agreements and the political structure they set in motion.

Considering women's organising in both conflict and post-conflict societies also helps us to reflect upon what are considered relevant and irrelevant conflict related concerns. By including women's activism, we are made aware of a variety of issues that might not be considered conflict-related by male-dominated political groups. One such issue is sexual and domestic violence (of relevance to all contexts mentioned here, but particularly cited in Cockburn's work on the Medica Health centre, run by women for women during the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the 1990s).⁴³ A lack of attention paid to the specific type of violence that women have faced during conflict within consociational peace agreements results in a biased peace agreement. Instead, it creates a framework for peace which understands violence largely as public, male on male violence and neglects to appreciate the specific harms that women have faced. As a result, an impartial peace is proposed and domestic violence remains hidden and unaddressed. Issues related to reproductive

health and rights also frequently remain marginalised in male dominated peace agreements, yet have huge impacts on women's quality of life and ability to participate in public life.⁴⁴

The work of women's groups has also facilitated understanding of how supposedly gender-neutral conflict issues are implicitly gendered - for example, the reintegration of ex-combatants. Female ex-combatants have been exiled from conservative communities post-conflict and have often suffered sexual violence from those within their ranks.⁴⁵ With an understanding of the specific ways that conflict impacts upon women, a broader appreciation of what the 'conflict' really entailed, beyond traditional understandings of public, male-dominated violence, can be seen. Similarly, by looking beyond the formal realm of political parties, elected leaders and peace negotiations to women's organisations, we can see a wider definition of 'politics' – politics as grassroots networking, activism and community-based work beyond the formal sphere. An attentiveness to women's activism helps therefore to expand our understanding of what 'conflict' and 'politics' means in divided societies. When we turn to consider the bases from which power-sharing is built, discussed below, this acknowledgement acts to highlight the relatively conservative understandings of these terms that consociational power-sharing is working with.

Consociational theory and civil society

As argued above, women's activism in divided societies has been clear across multiple contexts. Yet adapting consociational theory to be more accommodating to the interests and work of civil society appears, from the outset, difficult. Consociational power-sharing is designed, and theorised in the literature described above, in a top-down manner. It focusses predominantly on the elite level of formal political structures, with little understanding of civil society. Even in peace agreements which are wide-ranging, such as the Northern Ireland Good Friday Agreement, the additional features which are considered still largely refer to the formal political structures (for example the changes to the Police Service, or the emphasis that the Agreement places on human rights law). Likewise, the Ohrid Framework Agreement makes reference to the police, arrangements for the Constitutional Court and language in public venues and schools. It too is a wide-reaching attempt at post-conflict transformation, but again largely focussed on the capacities of the state. An understanding of civil society within consociational agreements is largely absent.

Reflecting this, the bulk of academic work to date on consociational power-sharing has focused on the formal political and institutional structures of post-conflict polities.⁴⁶ A developing body of work is emerging, however, to think about how civil society works and grows within consociational structures. Touquet and Vermeersch argue that scholars of consociational politics need to pay "attention to the indirect ways in which power is realised outside the realm of traditionally defined politics".⁴⁷ They argue for a movement beyond the "traditional discussions on state change"⁴⁸ to a greater focus on the "potential role of alternative social forces and ephemeral ties in helping to bring about a workable and viable state".⁴⁹ Murtagh's work on the Plenum movement that followed in the wake of mass protests in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 2014, does just this. She shows that the Plenum movement did not try to enter into the formal political realm and notes the "delegitimising" force that involvement with formal politics might have on civic action. Instead, cross ethnic civil mobilising was characterised by "restricted political engagement" because they had deeper aims: "a fundamental shift in civic discourse and thinking".⁵⁰ This recent proliferation of new work on extra-state bodies in divided societies draws attention to the blind spots in previous research and the dominance of the ethno-national model in academic understandings of

power-sharing. An engagement with politics beyond state bodies can help to illuminate the ways in which power works in divided societies beyond the consociational principles of the state structures and, again, illuminates politics as a broader activity than that just encapsulated within formal bodies.

Indeed, implicit in many of these considerations of civil society and consociational states is the idea that civil society can hold the key to ‘get beyond’ or overcome the divisions that consociationalism implicitly works with. Yet it is important to note that civil society is not necessarily always a locale in which ethno-national identities are forgotten. Indeed, civil society can also be explicitly ethno-national. In Northern Ireland, some of the largest civil society vehicles are ethno-national – the Gaelic Athletics Association (the GAA) is overwhelmingly made up of the Catholic nationalist community, whilst the Orange Order is one of the key institutions of Protestant unionism in the province. Civil society and cultural groups such as these can play an important role in upholding ethno-national divisions. Indeed, women’s civil society activism can also struggle to overcome ethno-national divisions. Anderson documents the ways in which Macedonian women’s activism did not adopt a neutral stance on the conflict, and, in fact, assigns “blame for the outbreak of violence and [takes] positions on contentious conflict-related issues.”⁵¹ Women’s activism and civil society work does not always immediately work from a conscious decision to work across ethnic, religious or ethno-national boundaries.

Furthermore, there is also a need to be cautious about the formal involvement of civil society in consociationalism, for a number of reasons. Formalising the ‘middle-space’ of civic society runs the risk that it will result in similar outcomes to those that consociationalism is critiqued for, such as the entrenchment of ethno-national identity, political conservatism and male dominance. In addition, there is the concern that those who specifically do not want to engage with formal politics will be driven out, in such a way that the radical nature of civil society may be minimised, and only those in agreement with political elites are admitted. Such concerns must be addressed in any mechanisms to integrate civil society into consociational structures. In addition, it is also important to emphasise that those in civil society who do not wish to engage in formal politics are still encouraged to mobilise and articulate their concerns and critiques.

Yet, despite these potential hazards, a large amount of women’s activism in divided societies has often been predicated on reaching across divisions. And, indeed, regardless of the potential difficulties in formalising civil society, it remains a distinctly gendered locale, with the majority of women’s political work taking place there rather than in the formal political sphere. Civil society, and groups therein, have allowed women spaces before, during and after conflict to organise as women and to advocate for their rights. The absence of civil society from consociational set-ups therefore has clear implications for women’s descriptive and substantive representation in the new state bodies that emerge following peace agreements. How might civil society therefore be more enmeshed in consociational democracies and peace agreements? How could a greater appreciation of civil society work alongside (or within) power-sharing institutions?

Mechanisms for greater integration of civil society within consociational structures

As outlined in the burgeoning literature examining consociationalism and deliberative democracy, there is little consideration within consociational theory about what democracy should look like in a consociational set up.⁵² It is suggested that political decision making based on deliberative democracy offers more chance of long-term conflict resolution in consociational arrangements

and that deliberation can involve those advocating for the wider public interest than simply bargaining for their own ethnic group.⁵³ We propose that the incorporation of civil society actors within consociational institutional frameworks presents further opportunities for deliberative democracy through developing a greater plurality of voices and vehicles for participation in post-conflict governance. Here we consider two potential mechanisms to greater incorporate and formalise civil society within consociational governance; a Civic Forum such as that envisioned in the Northern Ireland Agreement with consultative status for particular groups in policy and law making; and the use of a grassroots evidence base in the construction of policy, as seen in the development of National Action Plans (NAPs) around UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

- *Civic Forum*

In the Northern Ireland peace negotiations in the late 1990s, the NIWC lobbied for the inclusion of alternative political space in the form of a Civic Forum. Advocates wanted this space to act as an assembly for NGOs and citizen groups. The forum elected representatives from a variety of sections of civil society including the women's sector who responded to policy consultations and recommended areas for policy development. Although the Forum did not create its own policies, this space represented a participative mechanism which allowed for co-operation between differing groups and especially those who may feel excluded from formal politics.⁵⁴ In Northern Ireland, this was intended to allow civil society to share their knowledge and experience in the political sphere and to attempt a more considered and deliberative approach to policy issues. However, despite a Northern Ireland Assembly motion to reinstate it in 2013, the Civic Forum has not met since 2002. There is little political momentum around its reinstatement, suggesting the relative ease by which a consociational structure can neglect its sole civil society element. The Stormont House Agreement of 2014 re-envisioned the Civic Forum as a 6 person Civic Advisory Panel (which, as of late 2017, has not met) but which would appear to be a much diluted form of the original Forum.

The failure of the Civic Forum speaks to two key elements of consociational theory and practice. Firstly, it illustrates the difficulty of enacting a cross-community politics in which ethno-national identity is not embedded within the structure. The Civic Forum did not operate along the same logic of ethno-national primacy that the formal political structures had. As such, it was difficult for this very different understanding of politics and identity to link up with that understood by the Assembly. Secondly, by its very existence, the Civic Forum required the formal political structures to cede part of their authority by acknowledging the Forum as a legitimate basis for politics and policy making. Again, the elite focus that much consociational theory and practice relies on (as outlined above) made this difficult.

Yet, despite its relative failure in the Northern Irish context, the Civic Forum provides an innovative blue-print for how civil society might be more effectively linked within formal consociational structures. Writing the existence of a Civic Forum more firmly into future peace agreements (for example, requiring it to have a formalised role in policy-making) would help to more clearly entrench it within the consociational structures, and force the formal political structures to address it with greater seriousness.

- *Incorporation of civil society through WPS NAPs*

The process by which United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 is addressed through National Action Plans provides another model by which greater attentiveness to women's civil society might be paid in consociational political structures. 1325 clearly articulates the importance of women's contributions to post-conflict peace-building and is championed by women's civil society organisations globally. Accordingly, engaging with politics through the 1325 framework may encourage a wider section of women's civil society to take part.

An example of good practice in structuring the implementation of 1325 can be found in the Republic of Ireland's development of a NAP for 1325. Civil society groups and activists from Northern/Ireland, Liberia and Timor-Leste (the 3 focus countries) were engaged in discussions about their particular conflict experiences to build a NAP from the ground up.⁵⁵ The views and perspectives of the women who stood to benefit most clearly from a clear adoption of 1325 were not only included, but formed the very basis for policy advice. In a similar fashion, NATO, who have recently adopted policies on the WPS agenda, have created a Civil Society Advisory Panel on Women, Peace and Security to ensure their policy is informed by engagement with civil society groups and organisations.⁵⁶ Although in its early days, such a commitment has the potential to encourage greater consideration to grassroots perspectives in the workings of one of the world's largest security bodies.

There is no reason why NAPs cannot be developed, and have sizeable influence within, consociational structures. If members of the UN, then post-conflict countries have obligations to implement 1325 and are strongly encouraged to use NAPs as a means to do so. Situating consociational governments within this international frame of governance is one way of ensuring both that they adhere to international mechanisms, but that they also involve the voices of civil society. In this way, NAPs provide a means through which consociational structures can be brought into greater conversation with civil society. In addition, by encouraging close links but not officially formalising these, they continue to allow civil society to maintain a critical distance with formal political structures. This type of policy making is complex, but ensures the long-term involvement of civil society groups with policy-making and elected bodies - rather than those groups being merely 'parachuted in' to give a seal of approval to a final policy.

Conclusion

Across multiple contexts, women's activism in divided societies tends to reside in civil society, not formal politics. Whilst women still identify with and uphold ethno-national communities, it is most often in civil society where we see calls for rights *as women*. Understanding this and adapting power-sharing practices can help to distribute political power more evenly in post-conflict deeply divided societies and to ensure the inclusion of women's voices. Measures to do so appear difficult to enforce, most especially after peace agreements have been signed and implemented. Yet the developing WPS agenda, new initiatives by NATO and an emerging research agenda in much politics and international relations scholarship which has started to consider civil society and public activism beyond formal political bodies, suggests a growing awareness of the importance of civil society for consociational bodies.

In this article we have argued for several options which might be considered in future consociational settlements – a formalised body such as a Civic Forum, and a commitment to work with civil society groups to have detailed grassroots evidence gathering for policy making as seen in NAP development regarding UNSCR 1325. Mechanisms would require substantial

commitments from peace negotiation and political institutions, yet they would more clearly link formal political structures to civil society – and the more greatly feminised make-up that exists there, both descriptively and substantively. Within this inclusion there is also need for caution. Non-formal political spaces are highly important to those who do not wish to engage in formalised state-based politics, as they are also a space where radical political ideas flourish. Incorporation into post-conflict systems of governance may erode these particular strengths and as such with the inclusion of civil society into power-sharing must also maintain a distance from such institutions.

Like much feminist work in politics and international relations, this article has illustrated how an appreciation of women's activism and civic work extends the definition of politics beyond the formal, institutional, elite understanding that much consociational theory and work holds. Similarly, by appreciating the voices of women in civil society and listening to the issues that they raise, we gain a broader understanding of what conflict looks like. In doing so, we can establish a definition that moves beyond armed, immediately visible violence, to one which also understands sexual violence and the domestic sphere as important elements of conflict. As such, this article has highlighted the relatively conservative understandings of 'politics' and 'conflict' that consociationalism has worked with, both in academic literature and in political practice. Adding greater appreciation of civil society to divided societies has much to tell us about gender, power and the role of women in conflict and post-conflict politics.

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² Deiana, M. A., 2016, To settle for a gendered peace? Spaces for feminist grassroots mobilization in Northern Ireland and Bosnia-Herzegovina. *Citizenship Studies*, 20(1), 99-114; Kennedy et al, 2016; Nagle, John, 2013, 'Unity in Diversity': Non-sectarian Social Movement Challenges to the Politics of Ethnic Antagonism in Violently Divided Cities, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 370 (1); Nagle, John, 2016, *Social Movements in Violently Divided Societies: constructing conflict and peacebuilding*. Routledge.

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